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Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
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->From the Editor’s Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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All right, which one of you cursed me because of all this mention of the weather? Come on, confess! Since last week’s commentary, the temperature has been in (at least) the 90’s every day. They’re predicting an 8-day heat wave here in New England! This has gone beyond ridiculous. Mercifully, the pool has been getting a workout!

There’s an ironic article in A-ONE this week remarking about the fact that tech job hiring hasn’t picked up, thus slowing down economic recovery. DUH! Why would anyone think otherwise? Of course things haven’t improved; tech companies are folding left and right - much faster than others are staying on an even keel, much less growing. With all of the discoveries of corruption in some high level tech companies, it’s causing a major backlash with consumers. People are skeptical and hesitant to invest. Cash slows, economic woes follow. Maybe I’m wrong - I never took an economics course, but it seems to make sense to me.

Well, the summer is winding down, unofficially. Hard to believe that Labor Day is only a few weeks away. I get to enjoy it, however, with a couple more weeks of vacation starting now. I’ll be getting some more golfing in as well as working on some plans for work inside the house. And if the weather gets "better" maybe I can get some work down outside although this heat may have ruined what work I’ve already done. I hope that things get back to normal around here, soon!

Until next time...

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HighWire 0.0.8a Public Release

The HighWire Development Team would like to announce that the 0.0.8Alpha release of HighWire is now available for your use and entertainment.

Changes in this version include the following.

Extended menu bar, the current charset encoding can be seen and changed at menu title "View". Also de/increasing of the display font is available there.

Menu entry"Info.." will show now some basic information about the active frame.

Right mouse click now opens a popup menu.

Improved algorithm for line breaking to avoid splitting of text lines at wrong positions.

Implementation of memory caching of images avoids multiple loading of the same image. The pseudo URI "about:cache" now shows detailed information about cached images.

Implementation of <frame scrolling=..> attribute.

Bugfix tags inside links breaking colouring.

And many more ...

Download links are on the HighWire site.

HighWire Development Team

http://highwire.atari-users.net

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. It’s been a long, hot, humid week here in the northeast. It’s really starting to get on my nerves! It must be just because I’m getting older and don’t spring back from things like I used to.

Don’t get me wrong, I’m not ancient and I’m not feeble (not physically, anyway). It’s just that I’m starting to notice that the little things that I once just shook off don’t shake off so easily anymore.

For instance, it used to be that, when I’d been at the keyboard for too long, I’d give my hands a rest and they’d be as good as new after a couple of hours. Now, it takes me several days before my hands feel better. Yeah, someone is reading this right now, nodding their head and saying "carpal tunnel syndrome" to themselves. It might well be, but I don’t think so. My father has had CTS for several years now, and from what I’ve observed, his symptoms are different from mine.

I find it amusing to tell people, "Yeah, I never had this kind of trouble back when I was only using an Atari computer!". Most of them never make the connection that it’s been almost ten years since I used

only Atari computers, and that I’m therefore ten years older and ten years less able to just ’shake it off’.

Well, while I try to shake it off, let’s take a look at the news, hints, tips, and info from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup

Paul Hopkins asks about a hard drive for his Falcon:

"There was a posting a while back concerning the the amount of hard drive that a Falcon could access. Alas I did not keep a record for future reference. Silly me !

Now I am in begging mode, hoping that whoever it was that posted that information would be kind enough to repeat it for me please.

I am currently using a I Gig IDE. By how much may I increase this ? What is the upper limit, or is the upper limit defined by the Falcon and not the drive capacity,ie. will the Falcon ignore capacities on a HD beyond that which it can access ?"

James Alexander tells Paul:

"Upper limit is defined by partition size handling of used os release.

TOS-Release	Size / Gr sse	Comment / Kommentar
TOS 1.00 - 1.02	256 MByte	
TOS 1.04 - 3.xx	512 Mbyte	
TOS 4.0x	1024 MByte	
MagiC	1024 MByte	
BigDOS	1024 MByte	
MagiC / BigDOS	2048 MByte	(DOS-Kompatibel)
MagiC 6.1 -> FAT32 ->	Terrabyte	(nicht MagiC 6.01)
FreeMiNT 1.15 FAT 16	2048 MByte	(DOS/TOS komp. Partitionierung)
FreeMiNT FAT 32	!> Terrabyte	

128Gbyte are enough for any atari ;)

Drive:	Type:	Size:	Mech:	Comments:
Hitachi	DK222A-54	540 MB	2.5"	
Hitachi	DK212A-81	810 MB	2.5"	Not for CT2 Turbo mode
Hitachi	DK212A-10	1.0 GB	2.5"	
Areal	MD2085	80 MB	2.5"	
Fujitsu	M2637T	240 MB	2.5"	
Fujitsu	M2724TAM	1.6 GB	2.5"	No multiple read/write
Conner	CFN250A	250 MB	2.5"	
Conner	CP2064	64 MB	2.5"	No CT2 TurboMode!
Quantum	Daytona	500 MB	2.5"	
Seagate	ST9077A	2.5"	Sorry, no technical data	
Quantum	Europa	1.08 GB	2.5"	

Toshiba	MK1002MAV	1.08 GB	2.5"	
Toshiba	MK1924FCV	540 MB	2.5"	
Toshiba	MK2326FCH	330 MB	2.5"	
Toshiba	MK1403MAV	1.3 GB	2.5"	
Toshiba	MK2110MAT	2.1 GB	2.5"	very silent
Toshiba	MK2109MAT	2.1 GB	2.5"	(2109 mbytes)

Beginning years ago that list on DOITF030 FAQ.

As N O B O D Y send his type of used IDE devices the list is short as it is. I'm not in the position to buy and test some IDE drives for people they are lazy two send two simple words.

Jean-Luc Ceccoli adds:

"So, you can add these two models to your list (both are 2.5" IDE) :

IBM DTNA-22110	2.11 GB
IBM DJSA2210	10.00 GB

Both tested on my Falcon."

Dr. Uwe Seimet, author of HD Driver, adds:

"Actually a list of drives that do *not* work makes more sense. There is no reason why modern IDE drives should not work, so a list that would have to list any IDE drive does not make much sense. Otherwise some users will think that only the drives in such a list can be used. Actually my experience is that even those drives that are said not to work usually do work. Bad cables, or with SCSI wrong termination, are almost always the reason for a drive not working.

There is no upper limit. With HDDRIVER IDE drives up to 127 GByte have been tested. Drives with 128 GByte and more are also supported by HDDRIVER, but have not yet been tested. See also
http://www.seimet.de/hddriver_english.html
Note that the operating systems limits the partition size. For huge drive MagiC or MiNT have to be used in order to have partitions of more than 1 GByte."

Greg Goodwin takes the thread and runs with it by asking:

"Is it true for IDE drives that extra space is simply ignored? I'm considering adding a 2.5" drive to my Falcon, but have no need for 14 1 GB partitions. Two or three would do nicely."

Djordje Vukovic tells Greg:

"Hmm, IIRC the nature of the "FAT" filesystem (and possibly other filesystems as well) is such that it works best when the directory trees and the file counts are not too large- which favors a larger number of (smaller) partitions over a smaller number of larger partitions.

A larger number of partitions is also advantageous (at least to me) in terms of organization, backup, search, shorter paths to files (a path

too long causes problems in some older applications), etc.

Unused space (partition) on disk can be used to "mirror" some important data, e.g. the complete boot partition or something similar.

As for partition size, the disk space is rather cheap these days which offers a possibility that partitions are never filled over, say, 40-50% which is advantageous regarding file segmentation, access, etc."

Edward Baiz asks about downloading problems:

"I have been using Porthos for some time and even registered. I have always been able to download it even after I got my cable modem connection. However a few days ago, I saw that there was a new version (2.05) and clicked on the "download" button. The file is about 1.2 Meg. Things started in the usual fashion until I had gotten about 129k, then Cab stopped the download and acted like it was done and my file selector came up to allow me to save the file. The real funny thing is that the file name that was in my file selector was not the name of the Porthos file, but the name of the web page I was at.

I am thinking something was done on Ivers's end, but they say things are

fine. I get the same thing every time. Now, when I use the MagicNet Cab ovl file, the downloading goes almost to the end, then stops. Has anyone else experienced this? I have not tried downloading the file under MintNet, but I am going to and see just what happens.

Well I tried it out under MintNet and got mixed results. Using the regular Cab.ovl file I got the same result. If I used the Mintnet ovl, I was able to get the whole file, but still had to change the name before I saved it. I was wrong about the name of the file coming up being the name of the web page I was at. Actually it is like this. The name of the webpage is porthos.php. The address where the file was coming from is dl.php?File=PorthosD.zip. The filename that comes up for me is dl.php.

This all led me to believe it was the ovl file, so I tried an older version of Dan Ackerman's ovl (1.3101) and I was able to get the whole file, but still had to change the filename. Invers can say what they want, but they changed something. In the end I was able to get the file and that is what really counts."

Djordje Vukovic tells Edward:

I had similar occurrences several times (a couple of years ago) with CAB when downloading large files: file transfer would start and then, prematurely, a file-selector would appear as if the transfer was complete, although only a portion of the file had been transferred. IIRC at that time I was using Booklage's CAB.OVL for Sting.

I noticed that those problems appeared (at that time) on some web sites only: e.g. europe-shareware and vezz's hardware-hack site, and a couple of others which I do not remember now. After a number of attempts I concluded that the problem appeared when, because of net congestion, average transfer speed dropped below, say, 80% of theoretical values. It was almost as if there was a timer somewhere which finished the transfer after some theoretical period needed to transfer the file has been exceeded. I solved the problem by taking those files at times of

day when net traffic was low: i.e. very late at night. I remember I even contacted Vezz about that, and he said he was aware of the issue but that it was a problem of the provider which hosted his site (later he changed the provider, iirc)."

Jean-Luc Ceccoli tells Djordje:

"That is nice to hear, but I am still interested to know -WHAT- causes this problem. Is it indeed some kind of timeout?"

Martin Byttebier tells Jean-Luc:

"I don't think it's a time out prob. You see I have a cable net connection. Downloading Porthos just take a sort while (maybe 10 sec.), even with Cab but yet I do have the same problem as describe by Edward. At least with the Cab-for-mintnet ovl. With the STing ovl (latest one) I

could download it without problem. For me it looks like an ovl problem. The exact URL for Porthos is http://www.calamus.net/files/dl.php?File=PorthosD.zip

My guess is that Cab has troubles with the question mark. That's probably the reason why Cab downloads it as dl.php"

Well folks, that's it for this week. Tune in again next time, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Become "Turok" For Real! Football Season! Xbox Live To Be Unveiled This Fall! Dismissal of Suit vs. Video Games Upheld! And more!

->From the Editor's Controller - Playin' it like it is!

A real quick commentary in this week's issue; I haven't visited this section of A-ONE in quite some time! Last week there was an article in this section relating how game companies were reducing the size of video game packages. What took so long?? It's always amazed me when buying software that the package was so large but when opened, there was little in it. Even back in the Atari glory days, it was similar. Open up the box, find a disk or CD, a small manual, and tons of cardboard filler! Economic blunder or marketing genius? I don't know about you, but the size of the box didn't attract my attention. Perhaps the graphics on the box did, but never the size. I'm surprised that dealers and stores didn't complain about this years ago. I

don’t know - maybe it’s petty - but I’m glad to see that software packaging, at least for video games, may get smaller.

Until next time...

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->A-ONE’s Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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Microsoft to Launch Xbox Live on November 15

Microsoft Corp. on Tuesday said it will launch "Xbox," the online gaming service for its video game console, in North America on Nov. 15, the Xbox game machine’s one-year anniversary.

The service will require a $49.95 starter kit, which includes 12-months’ access, a game and a headset kit for voice communications with other players.

At least six online-enabled games will be available for the console at launch, with about 16 by the end of the year, Xbox spokesman David Hufford told Reuters.

He said initial tests of the underlying network for the service will begin with about 10,000 people at the end of this month, though he said the network will be able to handle far in excess of the usage it will actually get in the early going.

"We will definitely be able to support multiples of what we bring in on day one," he said.

As for how many of the starter kits will be available that first day, Hufford said "that number will be dictated by (retailers)."

Microsoft competitors Sony Corp. and Nintendo Co. Ltd. also will enable online gaming for their consoles latter this year.

Sony will release a network adapter for the PlayStation 2 as well as related games later this month, while Nintendo has not specified a release timetable for the adapters for its GameCube console.

While the Xbox has networking capabilities built-in, it only supports broadband Internet connections; the other two consoles will support traditional dial-up connections. The Sony adapter will support both while Nintendo will release separate adapters for each connection method.

Video game hardware and software sales topped $9.4 billion in the United States in 2001, with sales expected to easily break that record this year, driven by competition among the three consoles and growing mainstream popularity of games.

According to surveys by the game industry’s trade group, the Interactive

Digital Software Association, as many as 31 percent of frequent game players say they play online.

Forget the Football Stadium, It’s Video Game Season

Forget preseason. For the gridiron warriors of the video game world, regular season football kicks off this week in a very big way.

This week, Electronic Arts Inc. will ship "Madden NFL 2003," Japan’s Sega Corp. will issue "NFL 2K3" and Midway Games Inc. will release "NFL Blitz 20-03."

The releases come at a time when the video game business is scoring sales records left and right, led largely by sports titles. Within that genre, no category of sports game is bigger, or more contentious, than football.

"To the much more casual gamer, it’s got a ton of appeal." said Michael Pachter, analyst at Wedbush Morgan Securities.

"Madden," now in its 13th year, has essentially become a license to print money for Redwood City, California-based Electronic Arts, or EA. The last "Madden" title sold over four million copies across various game-playing platforms and the entire franchise has moved more than 25 million units.

This year’s game relies heavily on themes from TV’s "Monday Night Football," on which John Madden, the legendary coach of pro football’s Oakland Raiders, veteran commentator and the game’s namesake, is now a co-host.

Leading specialty game retailer GameStop Corp. on Monday said it has already taken more than 50,000 reservations for the game -- best-ever for a sports title.

EA was quick to jump on GameStop’s statement as proof, it said, that the market share game with rivals Sega and Midway was over before it even started.

"The early data from retailers shows a lopsided victory," EA spokesman Jeff Brown told Reuters. "We’ve destroyed the other team before they even got out of the locker room."

But with "2K3" Sega, the former console maker that dropped hardware to become a third-party publisher in early 2001, plans an attacking defense strategy against "Madden."

Sega cut a deal with cable sports network ESPN to make "2K3" look and feel in many ways like that network’s highly popular "SportsCenter" program, using many of the same graphics, color schemes, and even announcers.

Sega is so confident in its "2K3" game plan that it rushed the launch of some versions of the game by a week in a sort of safety blitz on EA’s "Madden."

And Sega could have a winner on its hands.

After last May’s E3, the video game industry’s annual trade show, nearly 40 top video game writers named "NFL 2K3" the best sports game of the

show. "Madden" finished runner-up.

While "Madden" will support online gameplay using Sony Corp.’s PlayStation 2 only, "2K3" will go online both with Sony’s network adapter later this month and Microsoft Corp.’s Xbox Live service, debuting later this year.

Acknowledging the position "Madden" has built over the years, Sega vice president Charles Bellfield said Sega is aiming for about one-third of the football game market on the PS2, the dominant game console.

"What’s important here is this is now a two-horse race," said Bellfield, who added that Sega is spending $15 million on "2K3," a hefty budget by game-industry standards.

The clear underdog this season is Midway’s "NFL Blitz 20-03," the latest title in a long-running franchise that also appears on multiple game platforms.

While EA is the No. 1 independent game publisher, and Sega has quickly emerged as one of the top names in the software publishing business, Midway has struggled this year with below-expectation sales and management challenges.

Wedbush Morgan’s Pachter predicted that at the end of the day, "Madden" would sell four million units, "2K3" would sell two million units and "Blitz" would sell an even million, performances that he said were strong for all three.

"No store reported pre-orders for Sega’s NFL 2K3 ... (one) store told us that if we wanted to own Madden within the first 5 days of its launch, we should pre-order it," Thomas Weisel Partners analyst Matt Finick said in research last week.

With most armchair quarterbacks acknowledging the game has come down to a two-man event, early indications are that Madden is looking like the top draft choice for yet another season.

Court Upholds Dismissal of Suit Vs Game Makers

A federal appellate court has upheld a lower court ruling that dismissed a suit against video game makers that alleged their products contributed to a shooting at a high school, attorneys for one of the game makers said on Tuesday.

Attorneys for Midway Games Inc. said the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit upheld a district court ruling that Midway and other game makers could not be held liable for a 1997 shooting at a Kentucky high school.

Midway’s attorneys said the appeals court upheld the district court’s position that there were sufficient grounds under Kentucky law to reject the suit, which had claimed that the defendants’ games inspired the shooting.

Video Game Company Tries Human Branding

Wanted: Adventurous video game fans willing to change their identities. Must be willing to live for a year as dinosaur hunter called Turok.

Hoping to push back the frontiers of advertising, a British marketing firm said Monday it would pay nearly $800 each to five people for the right to transform them into human billboards for a fantasy superhero.

Acclaim UK is seeking applicants who will legally change their names for one year to promote the latest installment of its video game series about Turok, a time-traveling American Indian who slays bionically enhanced dinosaurs.

The Institute of Science in Marketing, a business group supporting the effort, expects its so-called Identity Marketing technique will catch on as the next big thing for companies eager to reach consumers dulled to conventional advertising.

"It’s not a gimmick ... Every form of their identity will have to change for this to work," said Acclaim spokesman Andrew Bloch. "They’ll be walking, talking, living, breathing advertisements."

In a similar example, two years ago, a Kansas couple were paid $5,000 by the Internet Underground Music Archive, a Web site, for naming their baby boy Iuma.

Acclaim UK, whose parent company Acclaim Entertainment is based in Glen Cove, N.Y., is launching a Web site where would-be Turoks can apply. The company will cover the costs each winner incurs in changing his or her name, to be done in a legally binding process called a deed poll.

In addition, winners will received a computer game console, as many video games as they can play and 500 pounds ($785), Bloch said. He called the payment a token sum because anyone willing to become a human billboard "won’t be doing it for the hard cash."

The plan grew from a perceived need to surmount the daily white noise of advertising with something unique. Acclaim hopes each new "Turok" will act as an ambassador for the game, taking time to explain the origin of his or her name to anyone who asks.

"The video games industry has a habit of always striving for newer and more unique ways of targeting customers, and with Identity Marketing I think we’ve topped the lot," said Acclaim spokesman Shaun White.

Bloch described the original Turok as big and good-looking. "You’d be quite proud to call yourself Turok if you knew who he was," he said.

The firm’s target audience ranges from teen-agers to Turok enthusiasts in their 40s. It expects that the first five Turoks - others may come later - will be socially active and may even work in the video games business.

Acclaim said it would help successful applicants obtain a second deed poll to revert to their original names after a year.

On the Net: www.mynameisturok.co.uk.

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->A-ONE Gaming Online - Online Users Growl & Purr!
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Official Songbird Report for CGE2K2

I was happy to be a part of another successful CGE in Vegas. It was good to see such a strong turnout for the show, especially in light of our current economy and post 9-11 travel concerns. My hat's off to everyone who made the considerable effort to attend. Great to see quite a few familiar faces as well make some new friends this year.

I finally sacrificed some suitcase space and brought a few of my favorite 2600 carts along in hopes of getting them autographed. Most of the ones I brought are the actual carts we played as kids some 20 years ago, so it was fun to finally be able to thank the Activision and Atari guys who made such wonderful games. Hopefully I can get the rest of my favorite games signed next year, as I missed a few opportunities this time around...

The Songbird booth stayed fairly busy throughout the show, with only a few lulls in the afternoon on both Saturday and Sunday. It's both exciting and tiring to show off all the cool new (and old) Jaguar and Lynx releases to Atari fans; fortunately Scott Walters once again volunteered to help man the booth, so I got the occasional chance to gulp down some food and even walk around the show for at least 30 minutes. Also want to thank Glenn Bruner, who I finally got to meet in person, as he and Scott both brought a lot of equipment for me to display at the booth.

Vendor Night was fun but really difficult to pull off -- mostly our fault, as a group of us waited an hour (!) in line just to eat at the nearby and excellent Main Street Station buffet. By the time we got back for Vendor Night, the band was blaring and a number of arcade games had already been shut down. Still managed to play a few games, which is more than I've done in past years. And it's always nice to sit and chat, so I didn't mind the quiet end to the evening, and I look forward to a similar event in next year's show.

On the Lynx front, people were suitably impressed by CyberVirus. I think I sold all but one of the copies I brought, which was in the 10-12 range. I also got several nice comments from people who had bought Ponx and Lexis in previous years, talking about how much they enjoyed those games. Bjoern Spruck really did a fantastic job with the high-color engine for the Lynx CGE 5th slideshow, as fan after fan was stunned by the photo quality appearing on the Lynx screen. Having the pics fade in and out and the MOD playing in the background rounded this cart out as a professional production.

On the Jaguar front, Protector SE got a lot of play time as a new release, as did Skyhammer, and naturally I had the CGE 5th slideshow running early in the show, too. On Sunday one soon-to-be Jag fan got hooked on Zero 5, and I watched him beat the first three missions on his first try! He couldn't say enough good things about the Jag after that. That's why it's fun to go to these shows, and demo games -- even non-Songbird games --

because there are so many gems for the Lynx and Jaguar, and most people don’t realize how unique some of these games are compared to other systems.

I managed to sell three Jags and four Lynxes while at the show. I then proceeded to leave a small box of Jaguar carts behind in my booth after the show ended -- thanks, Larry, for not putting all those on eBay! ;-) And I picked up a few shrinkwrapped 2600 titles like RealSports Boxing for $5 each at the B&C booth for my personal collection. Also snagged a few of the new releases for the 2600 and 7800, too.

The Dig Dug Drop was quite a sight to behold. Contrary to some posts I’ve read so far, it seemed like everyone was generally excited and having fun with it. Definitely a feeding frenzy, though, but what did you expect? I stayed out beyond the fringe until it was too late to grab an unopened box, but no big deal.

To John, Sean, and Joe: you guys have done it again with CGE2K2. Tons of arcade games, amazing special guests, new game releases, and so much more. There’s a genuine sense of camaraderie and excitement exhibited by nearly everyone at the show. It’s no wonder that CGE is in my opinion the best gaming show anyone could attend. And special thanks as well to Don, Scott, and the rest of your volunteer staff who are always willing to help and stop by occasionally to ask if I need anything. That’s really cool.

To everyone who didn’t make it out this year: start saving your pennies now, and join us next year for CGE2K3! :-)

NOTE: Some commemorative "CGE 5th" Lynx carts and Jaguar CDs are now available for purchase while supplies last. Both are photo slideshows from the past four years of CGE, and each is hand-numbered. Price is $39.95 for the Lynx cart, and $29.95 for the Jaguar CD. Shipping is free worldwide for one or both items. Only 60 of each will ever be produced, and fewer than half are available as of this writing. Please contact me via email at songbird (at) atari (dot) net to reserve your copy prior to sending payment.

Carl Forhan
Songbird Productions
http://songbird-productions.com

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A-ONE’s Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Apple Unveils New Power Macs, Lowers iMac Price

On Tuesday, Apple unveiled a new line of Power Mac computers that feature dual PowerPC G4 processors, increased memory and the company's new Xserve technology.

The Cupertino, California-based company also pulled back price increases on iMac and eMac desktops and gave both product lines an optical-drive upgrade to DVD-ROM. The price reduction puts the eMac at $1,099 and the flat-panel iMac at $1,499.

"Now, for the first time, users can burn their own custom DVDs on an under-$1,500 computer," Apple CEO Steve Jobs said.

As for the new Power Macs, Jobs touted the new dual G4 computers and their use of Apple's new OS X version 10.2, also known as Jaguar. "These are the fastest Macs ever, and Jaguar really makes the dual processors sing," he noted.

With dual processors running at 1.25 GHz, 1 GHz or 867 MHz, the new Power Macs also feature the Xserve architecture, which supports up to 2 GB of RAM, Apple said. The Power Macs, which will ship with the OS X Jaguar operating system preinstalled, come with a new ATI Radeon 9000 graphics card.

Although he called the new Power Macs merely a "speed bump," Forrester research director Carl Howe told NewsFactor that the machines represent Apple's commitment to dual processing, in which two processors perform tasks in tandem -- or separately -- to enhance performance across the board.

"The main things are not around the speed bump, but that all of their professional units will be dual processor; that's a statement of intent," Howe said. He added that the new computers' increased storage capacity is probably more important to users than the speed enhancements that the dual processors will provide.

But Apple senior director of hardware product marketing Greg Joswiak told NewsFactor, "To have Unix-powered, dual-processing design at $1,699, we think, is a large statement."

Dual processors previously were offered only in Apple's top-of-the-line computers.

"The Mac OS X Jaguar is Unix architecture technology built to take advantage of dual processing," Joswiak added.

Apple claims that by advancing multiprocessing capabilities, the Power Macs could deliver 18 gigaflops (18 billion floating point operations per second) and could run professional applications, such as Adobe Photoshop, as much as 90 percent faster than a 2.53 GHz Pentium 4-based PC.

Referring to the dual-processing Xserve architecture, which supports increased memory capacity, Apple director of Power Mac product marketing Tom Boger said that Apple has delivered on customer requests. "It's really a new generation of Power Macs, not just a speed bump," Boger told NewsFactor.

The dual 867 MHz Power Macs, priced at $1,699, and the dual 1 GHz model, which costs $2,499, are now available at Apple's online store. The dual 1.25 GHz Power Mac, priced at $3,299, will become available in the second half of September.

Apple also announced it is reducing the price of its iMac and eMac desktop computers by $100, erasing last March’s price hike, which Apple blamed on its own increased cost for flat-panel displays and memory.

"We have come out of the crisis stage on memory and flat panels," Joswiak said. "They have eased and reduced the cost, so we’re able to then make a more aggressive statement on price."

Forrester’s Howe said the move is an attempt to drive sales and move inventory at a key time for Apple.

"They see back to school as a critical part of their quarter, and they want to hit their numbers," Howe noted.

Hiring for Tech Jobs Fails to Pick Up, Slowing Recovery

Technology employment, expected to be growing by now, is failing to do so -- further hampering the already weak economic recovery.

More than 243,000 jobs have been cut this year in telecom, computers and e-commerce, says outplacement firm Challenger Gray & Christmas.

Wednesday, communications equipment maker Agere Systems added to that with 4,000 announced job cuts, more than a third of its workforce. Equipment maker Flextronics International said it will chop 5,261 jobs. Tuesday, IBM announced 15,600 job cuts -- twice what had been expected -- in its broadest reductions since the early 1990s. Last week, cellphone maker Nokia cut 900 of 19,000 jobs in its networks operation. The Finnish company, unlike its rivals, has largely avoided big layoffs..

The pain is greatest in Santa Clara County, Calif. -- the heart of Silicon Valley -- where the jobless rate was 7.6% last month. That’s down from a record 7.8% in June, but it remains the highest annual increase among U.S. metro areas.

The job picture looks much different than what was expected earlier this year. Then, Silicon Valley job postings were rising and companies anticipated a tech rebound by now. Since, a host of factors blocked recovery, including:

* Telecom’s meltdown. Global Crossing and WorldCom filed for bankruptcy-court protection, further throwing their sector into doubt, including Agere, Nokia -- and RealNetworks, which cited telecom ’’turbulence,’’ plus weak capital spending, when it announced a 10% job reduction last week.

* Stock market jitters. The stock market’s weakness continues to squeeze a source of new capital for tech companies that want to expand and add jobs, says Mark Zandi, chief economist at Economy.com. That’s because the weak market is largely closed to the initial public offerings that venture capitalists need to recoup investments and funnel that money into new ones.

* Corporate scandals. Accounting shenanigans and executive indictments shook Silicon Valley’s confidence just as it was recovering from Sept. 11, says management consultant ArLyne Diamond of Santa Clara. Her hopes that tech hiring would start ramping up in the first quarter were dashed in the

spring.

Diamond cited a recent report that VCs, whose money fueled the late-1990s tech boom, had in the second quarter given back more money to investors than they took in. That also crimps hiring, because it deprives start-ups of cash.

The hope now, Zandi says, is that companies don’t cut payrolls more. That would further weaken the already soft recovery from a recession partly triggered by tech spending’s meltdown, says Lynn Reaser, Banc of America Capital Management chief economist.

E-Mail Can Be Key Criminal Evidence

Not since the glory days of letter-writing, before the advent of the telephone, have people committed so much revealing stuff to written form as they do in the age of computers.

All those e-mail messages and electronic files are a treasure trove of evidence for law enforcement officers, whether they are targeting terrorists, crooked CEOs or local drug dealers.

The challenge for police and prosecutors is learning how to dig up and preserve these electronic gems.

"Any agent can come in and look through papers, but not every agent can do a thorough computer search," said David Green, deputy chief of the Justice Department’s computer crime section, which helps train federal and state investigators.

Green teaches that a mistake as simple as turning off a computer can wipe away valuable evidence. Knowing such basics, and the ins and outs of privacy law, is essential when electronic evidence may play a role in so many cases.

"It’s like the gift that keeps on giving," said Tom Greene, a deputy attorney general in California, one of the states suing Microsoft Corp. in an antitrust case built largely on computer messages. "People are so chatty in e-mail."

E-mail revealed the shredding of documents at Arthur Andersen, and exposed Merrill Lynch analysts condemning stocks as a "disaster" or a "dog" while publicly touting them to investors.

Anti-American sentiments in messages Taliban fighter John Walker Lindh and shoe bomb suspect Richard Reid sent to their mothers were gathered as evidence against them.

And when Wall Street Journal reporter Daniel Pearl was kidnapped and killed in Pakistan, investigators used e-mails from his abductors to track them down.

When drug dealers are arrested, police search their electronic organizers and cell phones for associates’ names and telephone numbers. When someone is accused of molesting a child, his computer is searched for child pornography. When a company is sued, it can be forced to turn over thousands of employee messages.

"E-mail has become the place where everybody loves to look," said Irwin Schwartz, president of the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers.

One reason is that computer data is difficult to destroy. Just clicking "delete" won't do it, as Oliver North learned during the 1980s Iran-Contra probe, one of the earliest investigations to rely on backup copies of electronic messages.

Deleted files can linger, hidden on a computer's hard drive until that space is overwritten with new information.

"The best way to get rid of computer data is to take the hard drive and pound it with a hammer and throw it in a furnace," said John Patzakis, president of Guidance Software, which makes forensic software that helps police find hidden files.

Even that might not work with e-mail, which investigators may also be able to track down in an employee's office server, stored by Internet providers, or in the recipient's computer.

To go hunting through computer data, law officers need a search warrant issued by a judge. Winning legal permission to eavesdrop on e-mail as it's transmitted is more difficult, because that is considered the same as wiretapping a telephone. Investigators generally need a court order based on probable cause that the wiretap will reveal evidence of a felony.

Criminals, or people who simply want to protect their secrets, can use encryption software to scramble their e-mail. And special software can overwrite computer files, so they are truly deleted. Most criminals aren't that savvy yet, prosecutors say.

Even law officers make the mistake of indiscreet e-mail. Defense attorneys commonly scour messages between police or prosecutors to look for ammunition to question investigative techniques or suggest bias. Or, one of the prosecution's expert witnesses may have posted notes on the Internet that contradict his testimony.

Every U.S. attorney's office across the country has a computer and telecommunications coordinator, and the Justice Department is pushing more of its prosecutors to take cybercrime courses. The department also finances some training for state and local law enforcement.

"The problem is the uninitiated police officer who will go in and turn on a computer to look to see if it's worthwhile to send the computer in for examination," said Peter Plummer, assistant attorney general in Michigan's high-tech crime unit.

"When you boot up a computer, several hundred files get changed, the date of access, and so on," Plummer said. "Can you say that computer is still exactly as it was when bad guy had it last?"

A defense attorney could argue it's not, and try to convince a jury that evidence has been mishandled or tampered with.

When feasible, investigators usually prefer to use special software to make an exact copy of the contents of a computer's hard drive. This can be done without even turning on the computer.

Future Bright for Online File-Sharing

A new report from The Yankee Group predicts that free file-sharing systems -- such as Kazaa, Morpheus and Limewire -- will flourish over the next few years as legitimate music services struggle to provide what users want.

The report, which said consumers downloaded more than five billion audio files from unlicensed file-sharing services in 2001, indicates that the number of downloaded files will grow to nearly 7.5 billion in the next few years, when legitimate services will begin having an impact.

The Yankee Group predicts that unlicensed file-sharing will decline to 3.9 billion in a few years, while legitimate music services gain momentum.

"Efforts by the record labels to use the courts to quash music piracy have failed, and legitimate online music services have had little impact," said Yankee Group senior analyst Michael Goodman. "The future of music, however, resides on the Internet and its dramatically lower distribution costs."

Goodman told NewsFactor that despite the recording industry's legal attacks on Napster-like peer-to-peer services, free file-swapping systems continue to gain users.

"You're never going to shut down the free services," Goodman said. "You knock these out and there are another 70 to take their place."

The newest free file-sharing services are avoiding Napster-like problems by not using centralized servers. Some services are also moving their operations off-shore and out of reach of the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA), which has zealously tried to stop the file-sharing activity in court.

The latest Yankee Group report echoes complaints that the RIAA's legal efforts, which include seeking court orders to shut down Internet sites, have largely failed.

In response, RIAA spokesperson Amanda Collins told NewsFactor that the recording industry has, in fact, been successful in court.

"While litigation is not a business model, the courts have agreed with us every step of the way that these illegal sites are guilty of copyright infringement," Collins said.

The Yankee Group said that in order to succeed, legitimate sites -- such as MusicNet, Rhapsody, MusicNow and Pressplay -- must offer a wide range of content from all five major record labels as well as from independents.

The report concluded that they must also give consumers ownership -- including the ability to copy songs -- and must make downloadable files portable, meaning that they can be played on different devices at home, at work and while mobile.

"Consumers want to burn music," Goodman said. "[Services have] got to give them ownership, and you need content."

Goodman said that the latest versions of legal sites are improving by

"loosening their business rules" and providing limited recording ability. But these legitimate challengers still have a ways to go.

The Yankee Group also said that the recording industry must differentiate between legitimate music services and their free rivals by adding unique content and services.

The report noted that efforts to lock in content through digital rights management (DRM) technology is a lost cause, and said that consumers who want to share music will find a way to do so, "thereby defeating all realistic DRM capabilities."

Goodman suggested that content owners should use DRM instead to promote sales and increase revenue by letting users, if they wished, copy music files with software that delivers advertisements for similar music.

"You get opportunities to sell out of DRM instead of putting up a wall," Goodman said, adding that a single DRM workaround equates to widespread distribution quickly over the Internet.

While the report said that the next few years will be dominated by free file-sharing services, it does predict that legitimate, licensed services will gain users and are sure to have an impact on online music trading in the years ahead.

Goodman said that the success of legitimate services depends on a change in the current relationship between the record industry, which must learn to share control of content with users, and consumers, who will need some time to adapt to fee-based services.

Asked about the requirements for creating a successful legitimate site, the RIAA’s Collins said, "We agree that you can’t compete with free. The record companies are online and are licensing new deals all the time."

March Held To Support Software Bill

Between 40 and 50 LinuxWorld attendees marched from San Francisco’s Moscone Center to City Hall on Thursday morning to show support for the Digital Software Security Act. The bill, which has been introduced in the California Legislature, would require state agencies to only purchase software that offers unrestricted use of the program, unrestricted access to the source code, and the freedom to copy and distribute the software.

Red Hat chief technology officer Michael Tiemann, one of the organizers, says the purpose of the hour-long march was to bring together IT professionals, a notoriously nonpolitical group, for a common cause. "It was more about planting the seed," Tiemann says, noting that the marchers realize the state’s legislative power is really in Sacramento. "We didn’t have the legs for that," he joked about a march to the state capital.

At issue is the fact that California sues software companies that exercise monopolies, then turns around and rewards them with new contracts, Tiemann says. Open-source is more secure, he says, because there’s the potential for many different experts to examine it for problems before it’s put into production. But when there’s a problem with, for example, Microsoft software, there’s ultimately only one vendor who can fix it, he explains. "With open source, there are more eyes and hands," Tiemann says. "That’s

the difference between a monarchy and a democracy."

Tiemann says one of the primary objectives of the march was to show IT professionals that they're capable of influencing legislative codes as well as programming codes.

New Computer Security Dilemma: Lack of Viruses

The first half of 2002 has been an eerily quiet period for the computer experts on watch for worms and viruses, leaving some to trumpet their effectiveness even as their predictions of doom are now looking overblown.

Nobody has a bullet-proof explanation, but theories range from the introduction of enhanced anti-virus software to stiffer anti-hacker laws to more vigilant computer users.

Last year, security experts calculate, the Code Red, Nimda and Sircam worms caused billions of dollars worth of damage, knocking out computer networks for days and forcing companies to scramble for patches to prevent recurring attacks.

The wave of intrusions put anti-virus firms in the spotlight. They warned companies to fortify their networks against these unseen invaders or risk losing precious time and resources in network outages and lost files.

For the unprepared, they said, things would get worse in 2002. But with the exception of Klez, a persistent email worm making the rounds since earlier this summer, there's been little cause for alarm.

"Klez is the biggest case of the year and that's it," said Mikko Hypponen, manager of anti-virus research at Finland's F-Secure. "That's a big surprise to us and to everybody else in the anti-virus community."

Hypponen last year warned viruses would spread to mobile computing devices, including pocket PCs and so-called smart phones, a prediction that has yet to materialize.

In 2001, F-Secure issued nine "Level One" virus warnings, a label it uses to signify the most damaging outbreaks. This year the number is zero, Hypponen said.

Other monitoring firms report similar findings. UK-based Sophos Anti-Virus is detecting 600 to 700 new virus types per month, nearly half as many as a year ago, said Graham Cluley, a senior technical consultant at Sophos.

Ohio-based security firm Central Command, Inc. reported a month-on-month decline in July.

Other firms say the number of viruses in circulation remains steady compared to last year, but the infection rate has declined, which suggests that preventative measures and new security software are proving effective.

The lull in hacking and virus-writing has caught the attention of U.S. federal agents too.

Marcus Sachs, a spokesman for infrastructure protection in the 10-month-old U.S. Office of Cyberspace Security, told Reuters at last week's DefCon

hacker conference in Las Vegas that it’s an encouraging, if not puzzling development. "Have we seen a change in the mindset of the hacking community?... Or patriotism? Or are we doing a better job getting the word out about vulnerabilities and patching systems?" he asked rhetorically. Regardless, "it’s a reversal of the trend we saw last year."

A number of explanations could help explain the downward trend. Corporations are taking extra steps to shore up their computer networks, a development the anti-virus community points to as a big victory, and they have limited employees’ email freedoms.

Also, newer versions of anti-virus software are particularly effective against the more rudimentary worms and viruses using a common computer code exploited by young virus writers, known in the industry as "script kiddies."

A decline in cybercrime has been attributed to new laws too.

The U.S. Patriot Act, enacted shortly after September 11, and a new bill, The Cybersecurity Enhancement Act, call for a maximum prison term ranging from 10 years to life for hacking and virus-writing offences.

It’s adding up to an unsettling proposition. A drop in virus activity, even if it proves short-lived, comes at a rough time for the competitive young computer security sector. A number of firms emerged to cash in on the demand for security help in the past few years.

"For the anti-virus industry in general, a slow-down would not be very good," said F-Secure’s Hypponen. "But I’d love to see it happen. It would free up the resources for us to do something other than fight a problem that shouldn’t even be there in the first place."

Others are convinced it’s too early to claim victory and determine winners and losers.

"It’s the calm before the storm. There will be a next one," warned Urs Gattiker, scientific director at EICAR, European Institute for Computer Anti-Virus Research. "The problem is if we have to wait too long for it, will we be too complacent, and not be able to fight it off?"

Consumers Have New Web Site for Detailed Food Info

Got a craving for more details about your favorite food than the ones printed on the package label?

A Web site launched on Thursday by the U.S. Agriculture Department tries to satisfy that hunger with a breakdown of dozens of fatty acids, amino acids, vitamins, minerals, protein, fiber and calories, for more than 6,000 foods.

The database lists 117 nutrient categories for each food, including tryptophan, retinol, glycine and others that are not typically included on food package labels.

The data was collected from USDA researchers, food industry sources and other scientists.

Consumers can look up their favorite foods ranging from cheese crackers

to chicken patties, choose a serving size, and see details about the 117 nutrients.

The USDA said the food database includes brand-name breakfast cereals, candies and even ostrich and emu meat.

The Web site is at:

http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/foodcomp/Data/SR15/sr15.html

Robot Grass Cutter Cuts Through Tedium of Mowing

Tired of mowing the lawn? New Zealand researchers say they have a device that could make your neighbors green with envy.

It’s a lawnmower operated via the Internet.

The robotic grass cutter is controlled through a web page which monitors the mower by a small camera on the side of a house.

"What our technology allows us to do is to control lawnmowers and other robotic devices while people are away at work," Massey University’s Glen Bright told Reuters.

The electric mower, smaller and more compact than a normal mower, moves in a sequence across the grass, stopping in places that require trimming.

It motors out once during the day and then again at night with the computer directing its every move.

The mower should be up and trimming by the end of the year and commercially available soon after that, Bright said.

The device needs physical boundaries to navigate but by the end of the year it will be able to self-navigate and adjust to different grass heights as well as carrying out gardening tasks such as soil testing, he said.

The mower was developed in collaboration with lawnmower and chainsaw company Husqvarna, part of the Sweden-based AB Electrolux home appliance maker.

The next step is an automatic vacuum cleaner, Bright said.

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